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The immature plumage of Sun Lark *Galerida modesta*

Volker Salewski

During a stay in Comoé National Park, Côte d'Ivoire in January 1995, a lark was observed and photographed in a recently burnt area of savannah. The identification of this bird caused some problems. Four lark species have been recorded in the park: Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea*², Dusky Lark *Pinarocorys nigricans*², Sun Lark *Galerida modesta*² and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark *Eremopteryx leucotis*⁶. It was clear that the bird was not Dusky Lark or the sparrow-lark. From the photograph it was identified as a Sun Lark (presumably, on distributional grounds, of the nominate subspecies⁴), due to its prominent supercilium and black stripe between the bill and eye. The superficially similar Flappet Lark in the area, *M. r. buckleyi*, lacks a dark stripe between the bill and eye, whilst the illustration of this species in Keith *et al.*¹ shows only a faint supercilium which is described as 'poorly marked'. Identification problems were caused by the broad whitish tips to the wing coverts which formed two distinct wing bars in the bird observed in Comoé, although this feature is not illustrated in Keith *et al.*¹. Nevertheless, the text in this work states 'scapulars and upper wing coverts...tipped whitish'. In the description of the field characters, this feature is not mentioned¹. This implies that the whitish tips are not usually very obvious, unlike those on the bird in the photograph. Another feature which is not described in the text or shown in the illustration¹ are the whitish tips to the feathers on the back, head and ear coverts. Such features are however described for immature birds of the similar Flappet Lark¹. The plumage of immature Sun Lark is apparently undescribed^{1,4,7}, although Jones³ mentions finding a recently fledged juvenile in The Gambia, she does not describe the plumage. Mackworth-Praed & Grant⁵ in their text description of Sun Lark state that 'the young bird has white spots on the tips of the



Sun Lark *Galerida modesta* (Volker Salewski)

feathers of the upperparts'. This, and the fact that immatures of some other larks, eg Flappet Lark, show this white spotting leads to the conclusion that the bird photographed is an immature Sun Lark. ☞

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Institut für Vogelforschung, "Vogelwarte Helgoland", An der Vogelwarte 21, 26386 Wilhelmshaven, Germany.